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September 18, 2002

Docket Management Facility (USCG-2002-12876) - 5
U. S. Department of Transportation
Room PL-401
400 Seventh Street, S. W.
Washington, D. C. 20590-0001

To Whom It May Concern:

The Hampton Roads Maritime Association (HRMA) wishes to go on record with respect to the Notice of Study request for comments for the port access route study and the approaches to the Chesapeake Bay Virginia from the Federal Register dated Friday, July 26, 2002.

Northeast approach

The northeast inbound sea lane has shoaled to 28' MLW. The outbound has shoaled to 33' MLW. This channel should be maintained to 35' MLW. The channel may be redirected further south to avoid Nautilus shoal and be placed in such a position that would offer 35' depths without dredging.

Chesapeake Light Tower

Chesapeake Light Tower should be maintained for several reasons. It is an early visual reference for inbound traffic and is important for safe navigation. In addition, it provides a platform for critical real-time weather data and has potential for security control issues in the future.

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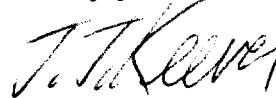
Southeastern approach

A complete review of the southeastern approach may need to be made for the following reasons. With the exception of U. S. Naval vessels, the channel has been primarily used by outbound coal ships. However, the export coal market in the United States has dropped by nearly 80 percent over the past four years and is not anticipated to rebound in the near future. Consequently, the gated channel (buoys 1 and 2 to 15 and 16) is seldom used by commercial vessels. All inbound and outbound traffic actually transits outside the gated channel. Thus, the deepest water is not being utilized by the majority of vessels, and, in fact, diverts inbound vessels closer to the northern shoals off buoys 9 and 10.

With the larger class of container vessels projected to transit the entrance to the Chesapeake Bay in the future, consideration should be given to the safest channel configuration for two way traffic. It may be time to consider placing buoys one mile apart down the centerline of the channel and doing away with the gated channel.

Thank you for the opportunity to offer our comments.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "J. J. Keever", written in a cursive style.

J. J. KEEVER
Executive Vice President

JJK/dwp